

Educator Preparation for California 2000: The Accreditation Framework

1995

This Framework addresses the accreditation of colleges and universities that prepare teachers and other educators for professional state certification in California. Accreditation is an assurance of quality in the preparation of professional educators, and is therefore important to the Commission, the education profession, the general public, and the accredited institutions. This Introduction to the Framework describes the context for accreditation of educator preparation in California, and articulates several principles for a new accreditation system in the field of educator preparation. Consistent with these principles, specific accreditation policies are in Sections One through Eight and Appendices One through Three of the Framework.

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California Students in the 21st Century

In the next century, California citizens will confront new challenges and opportunities. An increasingly complex and competitive economy will demand that individuals, institutions and corporations respond productively to new technologies and resources for obtaining and interpreting information, making sound decisions, and using ideas effectively. Mastering specific job skills and learning traditional information will not suffice because the "half-life" of skills and information is becoming increasingly short.

Californians must also be prepared to succeed in an increasingly diverse culture. Soon the adult population of the state will reflect that of the schools -- no cultural group will constitute a majority. Ethnic, language and gender groups are establishing new economic roles and productive relationships in California. Learning to see the world through diverse perspectives and to communicate in multiple languages will be increasingly important for the personal and financial success of future students.

In the schools, studies of language, literature and the arts, history and the social sciences, mathematics and the natural sciences must respond to contemporary realities to keep pace with social and technological changes. Future writers, scientists, artists, historians and other leaders must invent and use new paradigms that will enable all Californians to prosper in a changing environment. These and other future challenges confront the students who attend California schools. To enable all students to meet these challenges and attend excellent schools, California must ensure the qualifications of professional educators who serve in the schools.

California Schools in the 21st Century

To become productive, active, healthy citizens, students need to interact with competent and caring educators in every school. In the early years, learners' motivations and interests must be encouraged and fulfilled by dynamic, responsive teachers who are well prepared in the broad curriculum of early education, and who present that curriculum in developmentally appropriate ways. Young students' needs will become more diverse in the future, so their teachers must be assisted by effective school leaders and specialists who are specifically prepared to develop the children's educational, linguistic and personal capabilities before their early needs become critical problems.

As students enter middle childhood and early adolescence, their physical and emotional needs demand active, hands-on instruction in school environments that emphasize social responsibility and personal accountability. As youngsters advance in their studies, their teachers must have increasing depth of knowledge and competence in the subjects of their basic education. To make sense of contemporary life, students need the support of integrated teams of teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers and other specialists. Learning to find and use information and ideas

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requires assistance by professional librarians in the schools. Successful passage through the critical middle years also requires the firm, thoughtful guidance of school leaders who understand the growth and education of early adolescents.

Whether they proceed to postsecondary education or immediately to the world of work, high school students must become thoughtful learners of the full range of academic subjects: English, other languages, history, the arts and humanities, mathematics, the sciences and physical education. These advanced learners must have access to subject matter specialists who are effective at teaching the core disciplines. They must be assisted effectively by qualified health specialists, guidance counselors, information technologists, school psychologists, and attendance officers. The managers of complex high schools must be particularly effective as planners, communicators, and leaders.

When the new century begins, professional educators will continue to be the primary catalysts for student learning. The complex needs of individual learners cannot be met fully if educators function individually. Increasingly, the success of education will depend on the preparation and ability of individual educators to serve as productive members of professional teams that will be responsible for the educational and personal progress of groups of students.

Educator Preparation for the 21st Century

The future needs of students and schools have important implications for educator preparation. Professional educators need to bring many important qualities into school learning environments. They should be well educated in the core curriculum and the essential skills of writing, reading and reasoning. Educators should also be persons who embrace core values such as honesty, respect for diversity, commitment to social justice, and openness to change.

Core values and knowledge will be essential but not sufficient in the increasingly diverse and complex schools of the future. With increasing student variability, changing social conditions in our communities, and new developments in many disciplines of knowledge, it is no longer possible for generalists in education to serve all the legitimate purposes of education effectively. Individual educators should have increasingly specialized abilities along with the talent and commitment to serve collaboratively with other professionals.

Prospective educators therefore need basic general education followed by specialized professional studies, supervised practica and preparation to serve in diverse settings. Future classroom teachers need an integrated curriculum of content studies; analyses of teaching, learning and human development; and increasing responsibilities for the instruction of students. Other prospective educators need specialized studies and practica in school administration, career counseling, language development, psychological assessment, information science, school health and several related fields.

These essential components of educator preparation cannot simply be included in each professional's education; each element should be characterized by excellent teaching, disciplined research, productive dialogue and a spirit of inquiry and investigation. Preprofessional experiences in the schools should be carefully planned, supervised and assessed by qualified institutional personnel in relation to realistic expectations related to the competence of entry-level professionals. As prospective educators acquire their own postsecondary education, they must interact with competent, caring role models as well as committed students with diverse professional goals. Both the curriculum and the institutional environment of educator preparation should be educative in the highest sense.

Professional Accreditation and Certification

Professional accreditation is the *process of ascertaining and verifying* that, at each college and **44371(a) (1**

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university that *prepares individuals for state certification, sufficient quality characterizes that preparation*. State certification is the process of ascertaining and verifying the qualifications of each future member of a profession like education. These two processes -- professional accreditation and state certification -- have distinct objectives but they serve a common set of overarching purposes. It is critical, therefore, that accreditation and certification function as an integrated system for the purposes that are outlined below.

In education, the first purpose of a professional accreditation and certification system is **to assure the public, the students and the profession that future educators have access to excellence in content education, specialized preparation and professional practica in education, and that these components of educator preparation are oriented to the educational needs of future elementary and secondary students**. Assuring excellence in educator preparation is the distinctive objective of accreditation in this system. Ensuring that each licensed educator has completed accredited preparation is the distinctive function of certification. By integrating accreditation with certification, policymakers can also ensure that educator preparation will be responsive to the critical dynamic needs of elementary and secondary schools.

A second essential function of an accreditation-certification system is to **ensure that future educators have actually acquired abilities and perspectives that are essential for fulfilling specified professional responsibilities such as teaching or other services in schools**. To ensure that professional credentials provide such assurances, certification decisions should be based on valid assessments of accepted standards of competence for entry-level service as professional educators. Accreditation also contributes to these assurances by ascertaining and verifying that each candidate's growing competence is assessed and confirmed by an accredited institution. An integrated accreditation-certification system provides the strongest possible assurance that professional credentials are awarded to individuals who have earned them on the basis of their competence.

A third critical purpose of accreditation and certification is to **verify that each educator's specialized preparation and attainments are appropriate for the assignment of particular responsibilities in schools, and that these responsibilities are related to his or her preparation and expertise in the profession**. Assuring the appropriateness of specialized preparation for future responsibilities is a distinctive objective of accreditation in the system. Verifying that each educator's responsibilities are based on actual preparation and expertise is a function of certification. An integrated system of accreditation and certification maximizes the prospect that assigned duties will be consistent with prior preparation and competence as an educator.

Finally, the fourth goal of an accreditation-certification system is to **contribute to broader efforts to enhance the personal stature and professional standing of teachers and other educators as members of a profession that has a strong base of specialized knowledge and a demonstrated record of accomplishment in elementary and secondary schools**. Related to this important goal, an objective of accreditation in education is to foster improvements in the design, content and delivery of professional curricula and practica, and in the selection, guidance, supervision and assessment of candidates. A related objective of certification is to provide reliable information about the collective knowledge, competence and accomplishments of professional educators. Functioning together, accreditation and certification have greater capacity to enhance the stature of education as a profession in the eyes of students, parents and other citizens.

The overall effectiveness of education in California depends, in part, on the systemic cohesiveness of educator preparation, accreditation, assessment and certification. Attempts to disassemble the components of this system may serve the interests of some of its participants, but the effective education of elementary and secondary students requires that they be integrally linked. This linkage with the certification system is one of seven essential attributes of an accreditation system for educator preparation institutions in California.

Key Attributes of Accreditation in a Certification System

Prior to reviewing accreditation policies originally proposed by the Advisory Council, the Commission decided that an accreditation system in education should have seven essential attributes, which were published in a preliminary report entitled *Educator Preparation for California 2000: Background Information for a New Accreditation Framework* (November, 1991). The seven essential attributes of an accreditation system are summarized below. In drafting the accreditation policies in this *Framework*, the Accreditation Advisory Council and the Commission's professional staff sought to incorporate these attributes in a new accreditation system for California educators.

First Attribute of Accreditation: Orientation to Educational Quality: Accreditation policy should *focus primarily on the educational quality of educator preparation in colleges and universities*. Accreditation standards should describe levels of quality that are deemed to be acceptable by the body that has statutory responsibility for accreditation standards, *which is the Commission*. Standards should not focus on purely technical or operational aspects of educator preparation, but should enable trained reviewers with professional expertise to find out whether educator preparation in an institution is characterized by acceptable levels of quality.

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Accreditation reviews should also be oriented to issues of quality. During a review, the judges need to obtain evidence that relates to the educational quality of preparation programs and policies within the institution. Through experience, expertise and training, the reviewers must be skilled at discerning the important from the unimportant in educator preparation.

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The results of accreditation reviews should also bear on issues of quality in the education of educators. *The findings and recommendations of accreditation reviewers should focus on important matters of quality*. Accreditation decisions should hinge on findings that are educationally significant and clearly related to quality-oriented standards.

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Second Attribute: The Professional Character of Accreditation. *Professional educators should hold themselves and their peers accountable for the quality of professional education*. Professionals should be involved intensively in the entire accreditation process. They should create accreditation standards, conduct accreditation reviews, and make accreditation decisions. Participants in these aspects of accreditation should have experience, expertise and training that are appropriate for their specific roles in accreditation. In each step of accreditation, decisions should emerge from consultative procedures, and should reflect the consensus of the professional participants.

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The general public has a compelling interest in accreditation decisions that are part of the public education system in California. So do professionals whose work is judged by the accreditation system, or whose future success depends on its results and effectiveness. *The expertise and experience of the accreditors should be credible to the general public and the education profession in California*.

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Third Attribute: Breadth and Flexibility. For institutions to be effective in a dynamic state like California, they must be creative and responsive to the changing needs of prospective educators. In a society as diverse as California, universities and colleges must also be highly varied in their missions and philosophies. Accreditation should not force institutions to conform to prescribed patterns unless these conventions have a firm basis in principles of educational quality and equity.

Accreditation standards should be drawn so different institutions can meet them in a variety of acceptable ways. There are acceptable and unacceptable forms of educator preparation; accreditation should differentiate between them. There are also multiple ways of educating prospective educators acceptably; accreditation should not favor any of these over the others.

Accreditation standards should relate to broad domains of educator preparation, not to specific practices or procedures. They should describe levels of quality without stipulating how institutions are to comply. Explanations of the standards should clarify their meaning without making the

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standards restrictive. The expertise and training of accreditation reviewers should, moreover, emphasize the importance of preserving institutional diversity and creativity.

Fourth Attribute: Intensity in Accreditation. Accreditation should focus with intensity on key aspects of educational quality. The process should allow and encourage divergence among programs and institutions, and should also be exacting in assembling key information about critical aspects of educational quality. The scope of accreditation should be comprehensive, and the information generated by the review process should be sufficient to yield reliable judgments and conclusions by the reviewers.

Accreditation standards should encompass the critical dimensions of educator preparation. In order to recommend an institution for accreditation, experienced professional reviewers should be satisfied that the institution provides a comprehensive array of excellent learning opportunities for future educators. The reviewers should not have a gnawing concern that ‘something is missing here.’

Accreditation decisions should be based on information that is sufficient in breadth and depth for the results to be credible and dependable. Regarding each broad standard, accreditation reviewers need to fully understand the educationally important aspects of educator preparation at the institution. If an accreditation system relies on information that is too superficial or incomplete to serve as a basis for sound decisions, its lack of reliability will foster mistrust in the institutions and contempt in the profession.

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Intensity in accreditation (Attribute 4) is consistent with a focus on quality (Attribute 1), involvement of professionals (Attribute 2), and breadth and flexibility (Attribute 3). To find out if broad, quality-oriented standards are met, and to make reliable judgments and sound recommendations, reviewers need to assemble a considerable body of data that is collectively significant. It is not necessary that each item of compiled information be critically important on its own.

Fifth Attribute: Integration with the Certification System. As noted earlier, accreditation and certification should function in ways that are systemically coherent, in order to ensure the appropriateness of specialized preparation for the future responsibilities of professional educators.

There would be no reason to require future educators to earn credentials, or to pursue excellent preparation, if their subsequent professional responsibilities in schools were 'out-of-sync' with their preparation. There would also be little reason to include an accreditation process in the certification system if the preparation and expertise that accreditation verifies were not directly linked to the authorizations of credentials.

For these reasons, accreditation decisions about postsecondary institutions should parallel the kinds of decisions to be made about individual educators in the certification system. Accreditation decisions should be as specialized and specific as the authorizations of credentials because the latter are based, in part, on specialized preparation in accredited institutions. To the extent that the credential structure differentiates among distinct professional roles and responsibilities, these distinctions must be based, in part, on an accreditation system that has a parallel structure.

Sixth Attribute: Contributions of Accreditation to Improved Preparation. *Accreditation standards, reviews and decisions should contribute to improvements in the preparation of educators.* The quality of an institution’s policies, practices and outcomes should improve as its faculty, administrators and students strive to meet accreditation standards. The institution’s offerings should also benefit from the quality orientation of an accreditation review. When these effects of accreditation fall short, however, specific accreditation decisions should also provoke needed improvements in educator preparation institutions.

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For improvements to occur, accreditation reviews must identify and describe weaknesses in the quality of an institution’s offerings. Rather than viewing accreditation reviews as troublesome or intimidating forms of interference, institutions should expect substantive benefits from an

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intensive, professional, quality-oriented process. *Over time, the Commission should reexamine its accreditation policies* to ascertain whether substantive improvements are actual bi-products of those policies.

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Seventh Attribute: Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness. An accreditation system should fulfill its *purposes efficiently and cost-effectively*. Review procedures, decision processes and reporting relationships should be streamlined and economical. Participants' roles should be clearly defined, and communications should be efficient.

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There are costs associated with establishing standards, training reviewers, assembling information, preparing reports, conducting meetings and checking the accuracy of data and the fairness of decisions. Containing these costs is an essential attribute of accreditation, but efficiency must not undermine the capacity of accreditors to fulfill their responsibilities to the public and the profession. Accreditation costs, which are borne by institutions, individual accreditors and the accrediting body, should be reviewed periodically by the Commission in relation to the key purposes of accreditation.

A New Structure for Professional Accreditation: This policy framework by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing emphasizes the *professional character* of accreditation in education. Professionals have a responsibility to hold their peers accountable for established standards. Before adopting this *Framework*, the Commission relied on practitioners and other experts to create the standards for evaluating educator preparation in each teaching and specialty area. For several years, professional educators also engaged in local program reviews on behalf of the Commission. The most far-reaching change created by this *Framework* is the empowerment of professionals to make accreditation decisions.

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Consistent with the need for professionalism at all levels of accreditation, the Commission is implementing this *Framework* by creating a small body of leading educators who bring extensive professional expertise to bear on accreditation decisions. *The Committee on Accreditation consists of experienced, highly-respected professionals who can determine the accreditation of postsecondary institutions without reference to organizational perspectives because they do not represent specific organizations, institutions or constituencies.*

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As defined in Section 2 of this *Framework* (pp. 11-13), the Committee on Accreditation is expected to bring its *extensive expertise to bear on professional judgments regarding quality issues and concerns in the field of educator preparation*. *The Committee makes accreditation decisions consistent with the Commission's accreditation standards and other policies.* The Committee also informs and advises the Commission on policy issues that relate to academic content and purposes, and on the maintenance of excellent college and university programs for prospective educators throughout the State. Delegation of these significant professional responsibilities to the Committee on Accreditation effectively establishes a new organizational structure for the accreditation of educator preparation in California.

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